



202 foes love new Broadway Curve

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Freeway planners are moving ahead to expand the bottlenecked Broadway Curve on Interstate 10, a move some critics of the proposed South Mountain Freeway say could eliminate the need for the \$1.7 billion connector loop through Ahwatukee Foothills.

Meanwhile, Tempe leaders are pressuring the Arizona Department of Transportation to fast track the Broadway Curve project because the bottleneck is causing pollution and traffic woes on its adjoining city streets.

"I'm calling for them (ADOT) to honor their promise," Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman said Thursday before a Tempe City Council meeting to discuss the matter.

"I appreciate that they want to plan for the people who want to live in Maricopa and Pinal County in 2030, but they are substantially undermining the quality of life for the people who are living here in Tempe now."

ADOT has long planned to double the capacity of the 12-lane segment of I-10 near Tempe by adding a carpool lane in each direction and building a secondary thoroughfare of eight lanes along the 14-mile stretch from Baseline Road to Interstate 17.

The \$1.3 billion project has been reported in *The Arizona Republic* several times over the past few years since passage of Proposition 400 in 2004.

The voter-approved initiative adds a half-cent to sales taxes paid by consumers to fund light-rail construction and several freeway projects, including the Broadway Curve expansion.

Some Ahwatukee residents say the curve expansion would alleviate I-10 traffic to and from the Foothills, and could prompt ADOT to drop its controversial plans for Loop 202, the South Mountain Freeway.

"The amount of money that would be spent on South Mountain Freeway could be spent expanding the Broadway Curve, I-17 going to Anthem and I-10 south to Tucson," said Jim Jochim, an Ahwatukee Foothills resident opposed to Loop 202.

"I don't understand the decision-making process between the Federal Highway Administration, ADOT and MAG (the Maricopa Association of Governments)," Jochim said.

Hallman is upset that ADOT has expanded the project's scope so much that it has delayed improvements by at least three years - perhaps until 2012.

"The problem we face is that when the U.S. 60 was expanded to its widest width through Tempe, we were promised that ramps would be built and the Broadway Curve would be widened to handle more traffic," Hallman said Thursday.

But now, ADOT has delayed the project by expanding its scope to handle traffic projections from rapidly booming areas of Pinal County and the city of Maricopa, southwest of Interstate 10 and Ahwatukee Foothills.

"Now all of those things are hung on this Christmas tree," Hallman said. "And it's preventing all the residents of Tempe and the whole Southeast Valley from getting through the freeway."

"There's a huge parking lot in Tempe with NOx (nitrogen oxide car emissions) and CO2 (carbon dioxide pollution) raining down on Tempe residents. And people are exiting the freeways at Rural Road and McClintock onto our arterial streets, so it's exacerbated the tie-ups and on traffic on McClintock and Rural."

Hallman, however, said he supports the South Mountain Freeway, which would complete the Loop 202 designed to ring the Valley.

ADOT has envisioned the proposed 22-mile freeway as a bypass to the current I-10 route, running along Pecos Road and looping west around and through the South Mountain Preserve to link to 55th Avenue. Hundreds of homes in the path would be razed, under the controversial plan.

Work on the Broadway Curve initially was planned for 2009, but now that's the date ADOT would only complete its draft environmental impact statement. Current estimates call for the Broadway Curve expansion no earlier than 2011 or 2012, ADOT spokesman Doug Nintzel said.

"The price tag has gone up because the stretch that we're taking a look at is much longer now," Nintzel said.

At 24 lanes, the Broadway Curve portion of I-10 would be large but manageable because it actually would work as two separate freeways, with the additional lanes running outside the current corridor and serving as a "local freeway," Nintzel said.

"The Broadway Curve is already one of the widest freeways we have, but the concept under study would create separate outside lanes from Baseline to the I-17. It allows through traffic to travel through without a lot of weaving," he said.

The "collector-distributor" design is modeled after freeways in Toronto, Nintzel added.

"The fact of the matter is this is still all under study and nothing is set in stone yet," he said.

Nearly 300,000 vehicles pass through the Broadway Curve each day, according to ADOT traffic counts. That's makes the Broadway Curve the second-busiest section of the Valley freeways, only behind the leg where the 51, I-10 and Loop 202 meet near Washington Street in Phoenix. About 303,000 vehicles pass through that section each day, Nintzel said.

But the load on the Broadway Curve is expected to increase to 450,000 vehicles per day or more by 2025.

The proposed expansion would eliminate the need for motorists to weave in and out of traffic on I-10 to travel on

U.S. 60 or merge with traffic headed south on I-10.

"The overall idea is that you're separating traffic and reducing the amount of weaving drivers need to do," Nintzel said. "Yes, safety is a big part of this. If you cut down on the number of lane changes and weaving, you improve the safety of the facility (freeway) and you help manage the congestion."

Hallman said he agrees with that idea but wants ADOT to speed up its work.

Roc Arnett, East Valley Partnership president and chief executive officer, said it's high time for ADOT to fix the Broadway Curve.

"Isn't that handsome?" he asked sarcastically of the clogged area. "It's a cotton- pickin' mess."

"It's the second-most busy part of the freeway, for heaven's sake. And accordingly, it ought to be fixed. But it is not a simple fix. I'll be the first to admit it's not a simple fix."

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The South Mountain Freeway is still needed even with a wider I-10 as part of a comprehensive plan. Commuter rail also needs to be apart of the big picture and we need to start seeing plans for that as well. (Dustin5229, February 16, 2007 01:14PM)
